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Competencies and Attitudes Required of the 21st Century Librarian for Staying Afloat in the Changing Library and Information Environment in Nigeria

By

Ezeala, Lily Oluebube (Ph D.)

Veterinary Research Institute Library, Vom, Plateau State.

E-mail: lilyval02@yahoo.com.

Alabi, Adefunke Olanike

E-mail: oladesh@yahoo.com

Nduka, Stella Chinnaya

E-mail: stellaokocha4u@yahoo.com

Abstract

The 21st Century has brought with it a great transition in the Library and Information profession. The transition from traditional library practice to Information and Communication Technology (ICT) driven practice has posed a serious challenge to librarians. There is therefore a need for librarians to acquire the required competencies to conform to the new trend. This paper discusses the greatest challenge of change – Resistance and the competences that must be acquired by librarians to enable them stay afloat in the changing library environment. It also made recommendations on the way forward.

Keywords: Librarians, Change and Competencies

Introduction

There is an on-going change in library and information science practice since the inception of Information and Communication Technological innovation all over the world. This innovation in the information world started from the developed countries, and today has reached the developing country like Nigeria. Like every other novel thing that comes along with it, competencies and challenges that must be surmounted before it becomes part of the societal practice. So it is with ICT in the library profession in Nigeria.

Nigerian librarians are confronted by users' rapidly shifting behaviors and expectations from this change. There are demands for customized and personalized information environments, and individual participation and control. This demand therefore, necessitates that the aging and ineffective service paradigms that libraries sustain will not work. Our users have too many viable alternatives and will not tolerate rampant information – discovery failure.

On this note, understanding and acting on the competencies and attitudes for library services' progress is essential. After that, translating those

influences into bold and systematic change is imperative.

At this juncture, attitudinal change on the part of the Nigerians and librarians in particular in times of "change" is inevitable. The internet and other information communication gadgets have the potential to radically change the old information management system to the new and better one-Computerized information management system. The only problem to this system is the seemingly insurmountable challenge of 'change' facing the country, the libraries and the librarians in general. This paper discusses the greatest challenge of change – Resistance and the competences that must be acquired by librarians to enable them stay afloat in the changing library environment.

What is Change?

Change is a stimulus that encourages new ideas and enthusiasm for further progress. It affects people in very significant ways. It creates turbulence and uncertainty. People react strongly and unpredictably to it.

The challenge of change according to Niccolo Machiavelli as cited by Servicom is the fact that there is nothing more difficult to arrange, more doubtful of success, and more dangerous to carry through than initiating changes. The innovator makes enemies of all those who prospered under the old order and only lukewarm support are forthcoming from those who would prosper under the new. This resistance associated with change cuts across professionals in every field of knowledge. No wonder in librarianship different caliber of professionals came up with different excuses on why ICT should not be introduced. Some of the reasons are political, others are rational and emotional.

Political reasons:

- ICT will change my power base.
- I will not allow anybody to tell me how to do my work
- What does this mean for me/my career path
- How will this affect my ability to influence
- The machine can displace me.

Rational reasons:

- I do not believe the change will actually improve performance
- How will this work?
- We don't have the resources we need to do this.
- The changes are impractical.

Emotional reason:

- How does this affect people I care about?
- I am afraid I won't be able to cope with the change
- I'm not supporting anything developed by them which I haven't contributed to.

After the selfish reasoning, comes the symptoms of resistance in order they affect man as outlined by Service Compact with all Nigerians (SERVICOM). Behavioral symptoms of resistance are:

- Confusion
- Immediate criticism
- Denial
- Malicious compliance
- Sabotage
- Early agreement
- Deflection
- Silence
- Aggression
- Avoidance
- Leave

When one rejects an idea for a selfish reason, the next line of action is *confusion*, and then *immediate*

criticism, denial follows, because one will not want to have anything to do with a rejected idea. On the other hand, when there is green light on the rejected idea, the person will reluctantly or *maliciously comply* because success is always associated with crowd. As the person is complying, he is *sabotaging* because the compliance is not from the heart.

When the light continues to shine, there will be what is called *early agreement* followed by *deflection* as a result of shame. As the light of the new idea continues to shine, the enemies of change will not want to comment on the issue again. Even when they are approached to comment on the success, they will likely respond with *aggression* knowing that their selfish ambition is frustrated.

At this juncture they will start *avoiding* everybody that associates with the new idea. Eventually they will *depart* from the scene or leave the profession. This is a true situation with 'change' everywhere and it is a sign of incompetence.

The consequences of not changing are obvious. There will be stagnation, failure, loss of relevance and retrenchment as punishment by the authority or the agency that owns the firm.

What is Competence?

Competence is more than just knowledge and skill. It is a state of being fit, ability, power or adequacy to do something. It is an essential tool for functioning well in society and the workplace and participating in an effective dialogue with others. Information competence is necessary as a basis for understanding options, forming opinions, making decisions and carrying out informed and responsible action.

Why is competence so important today?

Globalization and modernization are creating an increasingly diverse and interconnected world. To make sense of and function well in this world, individuals need for example to master changing technologies and to make sense of large amounts of available information. They also face collective challenges as societies - such as balancing economic growth with environmental sustainability, and prosperity with social equity. In these contexts, the competencies that individuals need to meet their goals have become more complex, requiring more than the mastery of certain narrowly defined skills.

What are the new roles and competencies required of librarians to remain relevant in the profession?

Technological advances present individuals with new opportunities to meet demands more effectively in new and different ways, and librarians are not exempted. Librarians are required to:

- Recognize and determine what is not known;
- Identify, locate and access appropriate information sources;
- Evaluate the quality, appropriateness and value of that information as well as its sources; and
- Organize knowledge and information for clients

The Old Roles of Librarian

Librarians have administrative and professional duties as recorded by Dorothy Obi (1977).

Administrative Duties:

- Development of library policies
- Planning the library budget
- Supervision and organizing of the library
- Co-ordination of the library system
- Accurate maintenance of library records
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- Library publicity
- Training staff
- Continual revision of library programme

Professional Duties

- Book Selection
- Classification and Cataloguing
- Implementation of successful circulations system
- Conducting a programme of reading guidance
- Co-ordination of library programme with the curriculum

New Duties of the librarian

- 21st Century Librarian should be competent in training – on internet use, search engines, online databases and catalogues, access to e-journals, use of web based instruction and online tutorials
- An innovator, - being able to design the library's website, create blogs and be versatile in the use of social media to promote library product and services.

The competent librarian should be able to embrace the information technologies aimed at enhancing effective service delivery and also find a way of marrying the old and new duties to serve their clients better.

Conclusion

Emergence of internet and information and communication Technology (ICT) has not

occasioned the call for demise of librarian but to support it. Therefore librarians should have nothing to fear about ICT because they are powerful tools that provide opportunities for people to improve their professional economic and social well being.

We librarians have seen that our professional vision is shifting rapidly, but the multiple personalities of our work persist. We will collectively be legacy, responsible for managing centuries of societal records in all formats. We will be infrastructure, an essential combination of space, technology, systems, and expertise. We will be repository, ensuring the long-term availability and usability of our scholarly and cultural output. We will be portal, serving as a sophisticated and intelligent gateway to expanding multimedia and interactive content and tools. We will be enterprise, more focused on innovation, business planning, risk, and “collaboration as the new competition.” And we will be public interest, defending and expanding access to information.

Recommendation to achieve the competence

It is recommended that librarians should:

- Be friends to ‘change’
- Partake in distance and e-learning courses
- Read professional literature
- Tour and visit well managed libraries
- Affiliate to professional bodies
- Attend professional meetings, conferences and seminars
- Participate in specialist groups, personal interactions with expert fellow professionals within and outside the country

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